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SPOKEN-ENGLISH LESSONS FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING MIGRANT FARM WORKERS.

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PLANS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TO THE 200,000 SPANISH-SPEAKING FARM WORKERS WHO MOVE IN AND OUT OF SOUTH TEXAS INTO MORE THAN 30 STATES MUST TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE PHYSICAL FACTS OF POVERTY, MOBILITY, AND LIVES DISORDERED BY SEASONAL WORK, AS WELL AS PSYCHOLOGICAL HANDICAPS AND EDUCATIONAL DEFICIENCIES. THE FIRST LARGE COMPREHENSIVE MIGRANT PROJECT FINANCED BY THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND INVOLVING THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH WAS THE VALLEY MIGRANT LEAGUE IN NORTHWESTERN OREGON. THIS PRIVATE NON-PROFIT AGENCY, ORGANIZED IN 1965, HAS SET UP EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS. THE ADULT EDUCATION CURRICULUM ENCOMPASSES THREE AREAS--(1) SPOKEN ENGLISH, (2) BASIC (OR ELEMENTARY) EDUCATION, AND (3) PREPARATION FOR THE GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT TEST FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA. AT PRESENT, CLASS ORGANIZATION INCLUDES (1) SHORT-TERM SUMMER CLASSES IN OR NEAR FARM LABOR CAMPS, (2) EVENING CLASSES TWO OR THREE TIMES A WEEK THROUGHOUT THE YEAR FOR RESIDENT SEASONAL FARM WORKERS, (3) INDIVIDUAL TUTORING, AND (4) FULL-TIME, 15-WEEK, WINTER DAY SCHOOLS. THE AUDIO-LINGUAL ENGLISH MATERIALS PREPARED UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE LEAGUE USE THE INITIAL TEACHING ALPHABET AND HAVE BEEN REVISED AND EXPANDED INTO A 250-PAGE MIMEOGRAPHED VOLUME. THIS ARTICLE APPEARS IN "TESOL QUARTERLY," VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4, DECEMBER 1967, PUBLISHED BY TESOL, INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20007. (AMM)

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*Spoken-English Lessons for Spanish-Speaking Migrant Farm Workers**

Sarah Hall Goodwin

I. *The Target Population Group and Its Educational Problems*

Probably the most mobile of the population groups that make up this nation's sub-culture of poverty are the nearly 200,000 Spanish-speaking farm workers who move in and out of south Texas. They are the largest and longest of several "streams" of migrant workers who beat yearly paths from southern home bases north through rich agricultural harvests, making abundance possible for others but not themselves. The Texas-Mexican migrants fan out from the area of Texas south of San Antonio and Corpus Christi into more than thirty states. They begin leaving little shacks in the lower Rio Grande Valley in February and March, and some are still returning in November and December. They follow no neat patterns of travel, as would be obliging to educators and health and welfare workers. The 5,000 migrants of Crystal City, Texas, for example, do not all pack up at the same time and migrate to southwestern Idaho for the sugar beet, fruit, and potato season. Instead, these migratory families travel mostly in small groups to about twenty different states with each group having a different time for departure and return.

The mobility of the Spanish-speaking migrants is a characteristic enforced by poverty and lack of employment in south Texas, and encouraged by the urgent need for short-term cheap labor in agricultural harvests throughout the nation. Wherever they migrate for seasonal farm work, some families decide to "winter over" rather than return to Texas, put down roots, and eventually become permanent residents. Thus, there are pockets of Spanish-speaking farm workers in such unlikely places as the Yakima Valley of central Washington, the Willamette Valley of Oregon, southwestern Idaho, and Chicago Heights, Illinois. Some of the ex-migrants find permanent employment out of agriculture, but many continue to subsist on the earnings of seasonal agriculture and make short migrations out of their new "home base" to nearby harvest areas. Opportunities for education and employment are somewhat better than in south Texas, but the transplanted migrants remain poverty pockets in their new environment, though smaller and more manageable pockets.

In addition to mobility and poverty, educationally significant facts about the Texas-Mexican migrants include the Latin cultural background, sub-

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* This paper was presented at the TESOL Convention, April 1967.

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ordinate and isolated status in Anglo society, and unbelievably poor educational opportunities. Constant immigration from Mexico replenishes the numbers of Spanish-speaking people, renews cultural ties, and reinforces the isolation of Texas-Mexicans from English-speaking people and from opportunities to learn English. The status of Mexican and Americans in south Texas was described by one sociologist as a caste system with room for escape at the top. Until quite recently, Texas schools made little effort to adapt education to the special needs of the non-English-speaking, often migratory children, and provision of free evening classes for adults was almost unheard of. Adult immigrants from Mexico probably average a higher educational achievement in Spanish than third or fourth generation Texas-Mexicans, but that is rarely as much as completion of "primario," and usually is only one, two, or three years in a Mexican rural school.

Thus plans for teaching English as a second language to this population group must take into consideration: (1) the physical facts of poverty, mobility, and lives disordered by seasonal work; (2) psychological handicaps resulting from a subordinate, alienated, and isolated status; (3) educational deficiencies that will bring together in any group of migrants wishing "to learn English" those with no conversational ability and no elementary education, others with no conversational ability and a variety of educational levels in Spanish, and those with various levels of conversational ability combined with a variety of elementary achievement levels in English; but also (4) cultural strengths of the Latin background, which give individuals far more assets than liabilities.

There is an abundance of ESL teaching materials using the most effective methodology designed for many different student groups. These include foreign students in the U.S., children in Puerto Rico or New York, youth and adults overseas, and educated adult immigrants. However, we have not found any teaching materials geared to the needs of rural Spanish-speaking adults with little or no elementary education. The nearest thing to what is needed is a manual designed for Puerto Rican adult immigrants to New York City produced by the Puerto Rican Department of Education.[1] This text does not quite fit the needs described above because the dialogues reflect big city life, the pattern and pronunciation drills are not sufficient, and the lessons assume an adequate elementary education. Thus, when the opportunity for full-time work in adult education for migrants came, I decided to devote a major slice of time to preparing ESL lessons for them.

II. *The Educational Program in the Anti-Poverty Agency*

The educational program which provided the opportunity for lesson preparation was a part of the first large comprehensive migrant project financed by the Office of Economic Opportunity. The project is the Valley Migrant League, a private, nonprofit agency, located in northwestern Oregon and organized in early 1965

[1] Clara Rizzo Costa and Betty Wallace Robinett, *La Familia Vázquez en los Estados Unidos* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial del Departamento de Instruccíon Pública, 1955).

by a group of individuals involved in church and public agencies. The project combined educational and child-care services to migrant children, rural Opportunity Centers for maximum contact with migrant people, staff for maximum utilization of existing agencies, a philosophy of program development based on expressed needs of migrants (rather than of the agency), and resources for developing these programs. The original proposal also included a plan for developing ESL lessons for adult migrants and proposed an adult-education staff that would include persons specialized in elementary education—especially reading, second-language teaching, and practical knowledge of the target group.

Faithfully following the concept of developing a program based on migrants' expressed needs, the bulk of the adult-education curriculum became compensatory education at three levels: spoken English, basic (or elementary) education, and preparation for the General Education Development Test for the high school equivalency diploma. A small amount of time and resources has gone into classes in driver's license information, cooking and sewing, citizenship, consumer education, and the like. But one of the two felt needs about which migrants (and other poor) are most vocal is for education in the traditional academic sense. The other is for job training, and when that need emerged, job counseling and training programs were added to the adult-education department.

Not only did we encourage farm workers to select the content of their educational program, but also to choose the schedule and location of classes. (We have toyed with the idea of having them select their own teacher, but haven't found a practical method for doing this yet.) At first, the people wanted classes every night, and a group of fifteen or twenty attended a class in spoken English regularly every night through the first summer. At present, class organization has settled into the following: (1) short-term summer classes in or near farm labor camps, (2) evening classes two or three times a week throughout the year for resident seasonal farm workers, (3) individual tutoring, and (4) winter day schools which provide full-time education for fifteen weeks during the unemployment season. People attending day schools are supported by welfare assistance or OEO stipends and are provided child care. In the winter of 1966–67 there were six day schools with an enrollment of more than 400 in the three types of classes: spoken English, basic education, and GED Test preparation. This intensive program naturally provides opportunity for the most significant educational achievement, and this we have seen at all levels.

III. *ESL Lessons Prepared for the Target Group*

The original plan for the lessons originated several years ago in research for a master's thesis in linguistics. The Valley Migrant League provided opportunity for developing and modifying that plan. In the summer and fall of 1965 two adult-education staff members created dialogues, pronunciation and pattern drills for twelve units,

and outlined four more.[2] The dialogues grew out of suggestions collected over several years from the migrants themselves about situations in which they most needed to speak English. We subjected the raw material suggested by the migrants to three controls: (1) audio-lingual methodology, (2) the basic structures of English as given in the *Intensive Course in English* of the University of Michigan, and (3) the Thorndike-Lorge list of 1,000 most-used words. The structure and vocabulary controls were by no means complete, but they prevented haphazard selection of vocabulary and structures for the dialogues, and resulted in more adequate coverage of basic vocabulary items and structures than purely topical orientation would have produced.

Lessons at this stage were used in classes as soon as they were written. Teachers in night and day classes, most of them trained in NDEA institutes to teach Spanish, found the lessons adequate, and students made progress comparable to or better than junior high and high school students in foreign-language classes. At this point also we began using the Initial Teaching Alphabet as a phonetic alphabet to teach the sounds of English and as an introduction to reading in English.

The staff became too involved in administrative responsibilities to finish the lessons and also felt the need of additional expertise in language-teaching methodology. Thus, the League's 1966 grant provided for a consultant to revise, expand, and complete the lessons. This revision now is available in a 250-page mimeographed volume.

This volume is a teacher's guide to sixteen units and four review lessons. A typical unit includes four parts:

1. Basic structures or sentences translated into contextually equivalent Spanish. The basic sentences in each lesson develop a topic such as "Finding Work," "Shopping in the Store," "A Visit to the Doctor," "The Driver's License," "Money Orders," and "Buying on Time."
2. Pronunciation drills which are in the audio-lingual tradition, except for the novelty of using i/t/a symbols.
3. Pattern drills which give practice in the basic structures presented and introduce additional vocabulary.
4. Short summary dialogues which reintroduce vocabulary, structural patterns, and situations from the basic sentences in somewhat different arrangements.

Some further comments are needed about the use of the Initial Teaching Alphabet. We decided to use the i/t/a, which is a new medium for teaching beginning reading to children, for the following reasons:

1. Because it has an almost one-to-one phoneme-grapheme relationship, i/t/a provides a reliable guide for learning the sound system of English.
2. Because i/t/a is designed to provide an easy transition to reading in traditional orthography, it is far more valuable and usable to students with limited education than other phonetic alphabets in which symbols often differ greatly from traditional English orthography. After learning to read English in i/t/a, students can easily shift to reading in standard spelling.
3. There are many elementary textbooks in i/t/a. Though at present

[2] I would like to acknowledge the collaboration of Lane R. Williams, now Adult Education Director of the Valley Migrant League, and Robert D. Kiekel of Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, in the design and production of the lesson materials.

most of these are aimed at children's interests, some are designed for adults, and undoubtedly there will be more in the future. Also typewriters are available with i/t/a letters, and material of interest to adults can be transliterated and reproduced for classroom use.

4. i/t/a has proved effective in introducing reading in English to adults, both literate and illiterate in Spanish. As soon as students master a lesson, the dialogues and pattern drills are transliterated into i/t/a for classroom reading and writing and home study. Some of the beginning texts and workbooks of the i/t/a *Early-to-Read* series also are used effectively. Though most linguists and educators recommend that illiterate adults should achieve basic reading and writing skills in their own language before attempting to master them in English, we have found, on the basis of limited experience, that i/t/a is a short cut to learning to read English. Even illiterate adults can learn to read the English they have learned to speak when it is written in i/t/a.

IV. *Remaining Tasks in Developing Adequate ESL Materials*

Approximately 600 students have been enrolled in some fifty different classes in spoken English in the Valley Migrant League program during the past twenty-two months. This has provided opportunity to demonstrate adequacy of these lessons, both in evaluation by teachers and response of students. Short-term classes based on a few units of the lessons are valuable to migrants because they teach practical phrases which are immediately usable and because they stimulate readiness for further learning. Long-term evening classes and day schools, of course, provide opportunity for most significant progress. Beginning students in this year's winter day schools who completed 375 hours of instruction based on twelve pre-revision units and i/t/a materials were rated by their teachers as having a "fair" to "good" command of spoken English and averaged 2.5 to 3.0 on standard reading tests. We have found students highly motivated to learn and teachers enthusiastic. Given this combination and adequate time, the lessons are successful.

The Valley Migrant League also provided opportunity for discerning remaining work needed to develop adequate ESL materials for migrant farm workers. The next steps are:

1. Completion of a student's workbook to provide reinforcement of materials learned orally and an introduction to reading English. This will be written entirely in i/t/a and will include basic sentences and modifications of pronunciation and pattern drills, new reading materials using vocabulary taught in the lessons, and additional reading materials of interest to adults.
2. Development of valid and reliable tests for placement and measurement of progress. There are no standardized tests in spoken English for uneducated adults. We have tried the University of Michigan English Language Institute's Aural Comprehension and Aural Perception Tests with some evidence of validity. We need to develop a series of tests based on each group of five lessons in the text.
3. Development of intermediate and advanced materials. The tendency is to put students with a fair conversational ability into basic education classes using any of several excellent adult elementary systems designed for native speakers of English. In such situations, needed pronunciation and pattern drill is neglected. It would be possible,

though we have not done it, to assign half the intermediate and advanced student's time to a class using the appropriate level of a text such as *English for Today*[3] or *English 900*.[4] The problem would be lack of correlation in spoken English study and basic education. A better solution would be to develop reading and writing lessons from an existing spoken-English text, or vice versa. Probably the ideal solution would be to continue the development of correlated spoken-English and basic education lessons typically oriented toward seasonal farm workers.

V. *Summary*

This then is a brief description of an attempt to combine modern insights into language-teaching methodology, the new approach to reading provided by the Initial Teaching Alphabet, and some sociological understanding into an attempt to produce workable lessons in English as a second language for a hitherto-neglected poverty group. The poverty group is characterized by its combination of agricultural migrancy, Mexican origin, and low educational achivement. We believe that this approach to lesson preparation for this group is unique.

[3] (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1964).

[4] (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964).